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The History of the Berschauer Family

1692 to 1940

****It has been difficult to find adequate information to reconstruct our family origins without leaving gaping holes in the time sequence. This is due to the fact that the Berschauers never write anything down and have been content to pass the history of their ancestors by simply retelling stories from generation to generation. As could be expected, much is lost and forgotten by this process. Therefore I suggest we work together and make a record of as much information as possible. If you have any corrections to what I have already done or have additional facts no matter how small please send them to me or at least make a note of them for future reference.**

Thank you.

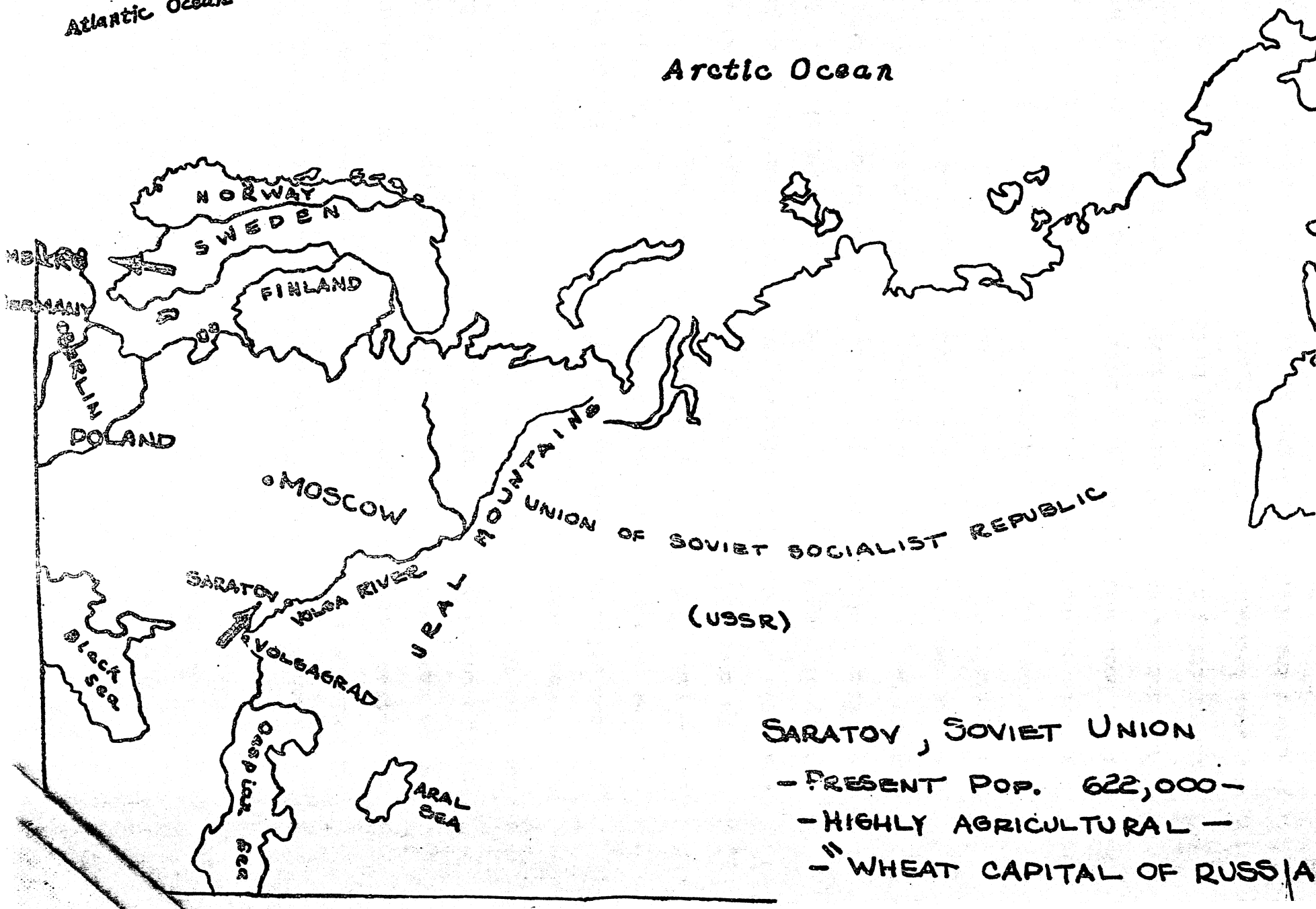
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Atlantic Ocean

Arctic Ocean



SARATOV, SOVIET UNION

- PRESENT POP. 622,000 -
- HIGHLY AGRICULTURAL -
- "WHEAT CAPITAL OF RUSSIA"

Much to the dismay of this writer it seems that family histories are seldom written down and recorded, only passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. Even more disheartening is the fact that the Berschauer lineage is no exception. Because of this unfortunate practice much about our forefathers has been lost and that which remains is in many cases quite vague. However due to the remarkable memory of Edward Berschauer there is much that can still be reconstructed. In fact, bits of information, with the help of a stack of reference material, can be linked back to the year 1692, and this is where our story begins.

In that year, 1692, a very insignificant treaty as far as the world will ever be concerned had a dynamic influence on the history of many German families, the Berschauers included. It is shown from history texts that Western Europe in the late 17th century was an interrelated conglomerate with respect to its leaders. One such case is that in which Peter the Great of Russia, at that time grossly displeased with his own countrymen, went spouse hunting for his favorite niece Catherine. Of course it must be realized that this was no strange occurrence for this time in history as the head of household decided to whom his family should be married. It was not the choice of each individual as we are now accustomed. While visiting a small province in Central Germany, an arrangement was made between Peter the Great and the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg in order that Catherine might be betrothed to the Grand Duke's only heir Alexander. As normal, a dowry was settled upon but in this

case the Duke asked for a very unusual addition to this dowry. This addition consisted of a treaty to be enacted over a 150 year period that would allow vast concessions of land to be leased to the German subjects of Mecklenburg Province. The purpose of this treaty was beneficial to both the Germans and the Russians. (At this time that is.) The Germans were highly ambitious and skilled in agriculture but were overpopulated on their resources. The Russians, on the other hand, had great amounts of unused farm land but a poor ability to capitalize on their wealth. Therefore it was agreed that these German people would be given a limitless lease on a large area of non-cultivated land along the Volga River. This region was just above the present city of Volgograd, once known as Stalingrad. An important provision of this treaty and the most concerning to the German people was that for this 150 year period they would be independent of Russian law. This stipulated that no involuntary military service could be enacted. At the end of the 150 years these colonies would become liable to the laws of the land and legally Russian citizens.

One of the thousands of families involved was our own who settled in an area called Saratov, directly alongside the Volga River. They, like the others, were enticed by the opportunity of new land and by the guarantee of freedom of religion and speech. As mentioned previously, much of our early history has been forgotten or lost in time, and from this original 150 year period little remains to be recorded at this time. No names or family sizes whatsoever are remembered. What I have been able to find, however, says much about our pioneer ancestors. As mentioned before, this

new land was virgin territory and the Russian people were having little luck in making it prosperous. History books now tell us, however, that this land above Volgograd was converted into the present "Wheat Belt" of western Russia and from this agricultural society a present day industrial leader has emerged. Even though the German people failed to record their achievements little doubt is left as to whom the credit for this economic turnover should be given.

The first complete account of our family background comes from a time nearly twenty years after the close of the 150 year treaty. It is centered about the household of Henry Berschauer who for purposes of clarity was the father of Jacob Berschauer or the grandfather of Edward, Emma, Manuel Berschauer, etc., etc. This period in time is for all practical purposes 1870. Before I continue any farther along the family timeline let me review what is now known about the life and family styles of the household of Henry Berschauer of Saratov Russia. Comprising this household were Henry, two of his brothers and a younger sister (all three of which were deaf and dumb), his wife and their immediate family. Henry and his wife (name unknown) had four sons and a daughter. The oldest was Henry Jr., then John, then Jacob (as stated before, father of Edward, Emma, Manuel, etc.), then Lena, their only daughter, and finally their youngest son Alexander, who was born in 1899. A simple count suggests that ten persons lived under one roof. This however is a false assumption. You see, the customs of this day differ greatly from what we are now resigned to and at this time when a young man married he did not leave his parents. Rather he

brought his new bride back to his father's household where they lived together as one family. The only privacy availed was possibly one bedroom. Otherwise everyone lived together as one. Another point that is not readily understood by us today is the position of Henry as head of the house. This was a position of supreme power. He distributed all money, gave all work assignments for the day, rationed the daily meals and was the law maker and enforcer for everyone. For example if a wife of one of Henry's sons needed a dress she did not go to her husband for money or permission. She went to Henry himself. All income went to him and everything outgoing was approved by him. This authority went clear down to meal-time as food was short at times and a rationing system was needed. A good day's work meant plenty to eat that night which accounts for a portion of the ambition these people displayed. Rarely did anyone go against the head of the house, for besides other consequences it could mean going hungry that night.

While on the subject of meals, let's look at an average supper. All of the household possibly fifteen to twenty were seated on benches at a long wooden table with Henry in the center. Usually dinner consisted of a stew of some kind. The meat was delegated as Henry felt each was entitled and the stew you could eat until it was gone. If sausage was the meat of the day you might receive a piece four inches long and that would be all; the rest you ate would simply be a filler which you dipped from a bowl at the center of the table. Wooden bowls and spoons were used. When times were rough or especially in winter potatoes were cooked in lard and this was the meal. This was inexpensive and supplied the fat needed

to endure the cold which was often 45° below zero. During slaughter time the fat off a porker was cured in salt brine and later spread upon rye bread like butter. Rye was the everyday bread while white bread was made into rolls and eaten like cake for it was considered a delicacy.

The family home was large and modest with the stock pens and corral directly outside the back door. Everything was kept in a tight area like this as during the winter it was necessary for a man to care for his stock. A family could seldom afford to raise more than just what was needed to get them through. Any surplus was used to barter for sugar and other commodities they couldn't produce themselves. Money as we know it today was seldom used. During winter when there were few chores to be done, women and children spun wool on a spinning wheel finally making it into cloth needed for the family's clothing.

Field work and harvest were the average day's duties. A household owned many acres of wheat and when a task was needed to be done a great distance from the home, a small crew was sent out to camp until the work was completed. All these chores were of course delegated by Henry himself and it was to him you answered at the end of a day. Harvest was the high point of the year and always an entire family project. As soon as children were old enough to walk they were given some job to do in the harvest process. The men would cut the wheat using hand scythes while the women and children followed bundling and tying the wheat into shocks. These bundles were then placed down upon a rocky plateau and the work horses were driven over them. This process would tramp the grain from the

stands so that the women and children could easily sack and separate the harvest. Back at the home the grain was run through a fanmill to separate the chaff from the wheat. Whenever flour was needed the grain was hauled to a nearby miller where it was ground. Surplus wheat was sold.

The life of a woman was very rough and her position in society was a lowly one. Men were the providers and naturally the leaders while women were expected to do as they were told. Female children were of no value and were therefore given little. Every newborn son, on the other hand, was allotted fifteen acres of land which would be his and stay with him through life. He could, as he grew up, acquire more land from others and build his own farm from the original fifteen acres. It is worth noting that, as mentioned before, this land was legally only leased from the Russian government. However, the Germans truly believed it would never be taken from them. It is this very faith that many of our ancestors may have died for during the Bolshevik Revolution.

One last point of interest dealing with the everyday lives of our ancestors involves the interaction between the different families within these German colonies. Socially the activities would compare closely to those of any early American community. Economically however these people displayed a tremendous alliance among each other for no one family could produce enough to fulfill all its needs. Therefore the different households specialized in some particular field. These might include a shoemaker, doctor, miller or, in the case of Henry, a butcher. Henry was the Saratov butcher and during the slaughter time he traveled from house to

house helping with meat packing work including the curing of meats and the making of sausage. These services he traded for shoes or some other commodity needed by his household.

Starting now from the year 1870, the following are the facts leading to the movement of the Berschauer family to America. As explained, all German immigrants after the year 1842, were considered Russian citizens and were eligible for taxation and military duty. The first family affected by military induction in the Saratov area was that of Henry Berschauer. A Russian official came to Henry and told him that one member of his household must serve in the army. He chose his son Jacob to be that man. Jacob was only four years of age at the time but would face induction when sixteen. Because of this choice, Jacob was given seven years of Russian schooling while the other children were taught in German schools within the community. When Jacob was just a young man he married Catherine Templing whose family lived only a few miles from the Berschauers. Jacob had already been drafted and was serving in the military at that time. Their first child, a son, Edward, was born in Saratov in the year 1906. Henry supported Catherine and Edward with some help from Jacob. Jacob made roughly twenty dollars a month and would send half home to his father for supporting his wife and son. Jacob was given leaves at which time he returned to Saratov and his family. The military was a horrible life and Jacob would be required to serve as long as he was fit. Needless to say he despised every minute of it. In 1909, Jacob and Catherine had a daughter Emma and this addition to the family was one more incentive for Jacob to desert the army. In 1911 with Catherine again pregnant

Jacob sold all his worldly belongings and during a holiday leave fled Russia for his true homeland, Germany. He collected \$400.00 and this would be enough to cover train fare across Germany to Hamburg and then fare from Hamburg to Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A., by ship. Jacob had heard much about America and knew he would be safe to start a new life there. Traveling through Russia was dangerous, as he could be charged with treason for desertion. Once reaching the German border, however, they were safe for the Germans protected their nationals.

Our history now has Jacob and Catherine along with their children, Edward and Emma, in Hamburg, Germany, ready to board a ship for Baltimore. Before continuing let me wrap up our Russian heritage, for today we know little for certain about our ancestry remaining in the old country. Is there a chance that the Berschauer name is still being carried on in Russia or Germany? The answer is yes. Henry and his wife passed away in 1925 or 1926 and with them the last communication to their son Jacob. Of course still living at that time were Jacob's brothers, Henry Jr., John and Alexander, still only a young man. Jacob and Lena were the only ones to leave Russia, and, therefore, the large percentage of the Berschauer family remained in the old country. One historical event however leaves doubt in our mind that Berschauers still live in Saratov. After Jacob fled Russia the nation went through years of revolution, the most savage being the Bolshevik. At last word the Bolsheviks had destroyed millions of acres of farmland in the Saratov region and had killed or imprisoned many of the German immigrants. From this point on, no word has ever been communicated from our distant ancestors.

Therefore your guess is as good as mine as to their fate. However these were extremely strong people and not easily shaken so possibly the odds point to a Berschauer bloodline still existing on the Russian frontier. Even though nearly two hundred years of our background was spent in Russia it is almost certain that no Russian blood flows in our veins. The original German immigrants considered the Russians highly inferior and absolutely no intermarriage was tolerated. If a young Berschauer ever did marry into a Russian family he or she most assuredly would have been cast out of the household forever. The only two other facts that we can be certain of are our religious and linguistic backgrounds. Nearly all these German people were Lutheran and remained that way throughout this time. A rough southern dialect of German was the only language spoken in the home.

Jacob and Catherine used all the money remaining from their train fares across Germany to purchase four fourth class tickets to Baltimore. Fourth class has long been extinct in our modern transportation system and those facilities now used for livestock are located in their place. The Berschauers had only a space in the bottom of the ship with small portholes to peer from. With only pennies remaining, Jacob's assets consisted only of his family, a few clothes and a large trunk filled with smoked meats, cheese and rye bread. As mentioned before, Jacob's father was the community butcher and before leaving Saratov he prepared this chest to last them through the voyage. The trip was long and hard and stories tell of many younger children who died from hunger and disease. These fourth class quarters were packed with immigrants

and little imagination is needed to realize the conditions that existed. Docking in Baltimore, all four were checked thoroughly for disease and found fit by immigration authorities. If disease was found the people were forced to go elsewhere until cured. Jacob's tickets called for a short lay-over in Baltimore and then with financial aid from the U. S. government they were transported by train to Hoisington, Kansas. Jacob knew no English and picked up all he knew from day to day encounters with Americans. Fate was not the only reason why Hoisington was chosen as our first point of settlement in America. As mentioned previously Lena Berschauer also immigrated to America prior to the time that Jacob and his family arrived here. Lena married Henry Gideon in the old country and he alone first traveled to Hoisington. When settled he sent money for her first class travel to join him. Her letters spoke of heaven on earth and opportunity for young ambitious immigrants. This is what enticed Jacob to choose Kansas as his new home. An interesting point that is readily noticed about Lena is her use of her hands in talking. If you remember this is due to her many years of living with two uncles and an aunt, all three of whom were deaf and dumb.

So there in lie the amazing events surrounding the settlement of Jacob Berschauer and his family in Hoisington, Kansas. Names in our family have an incredible habit of repeating themselves through generations. Therefore from this point on when names are mentioned acquaint them with our modern history and not with those of our German-Russian heritage. Arriving in Hoisington the family stayed with the Templings, parents of Catherine. After a few days

they moved in with Lena and Henry Gideon at which time Jacob began work as a ditch digger until better employment could be found. A nearby railroad shop welcomed employees who had traveled from abroad as they were hard working and desperate. It was because of this that Jacob began work at the astounding rate of seventeen cents per hour. He was working in the roundhouse from six p.m. to six a.m. This surprisingly enough was big wages to these early settlers and because of their ability to make do with very little, Jacob was able to support his family besides sending money to the old country in hope that others could follow him to America; a wish that seems never came true. Letters were often censored by Russian officials and the lines of communication were seemingly non-existent. One other Berschauer however did make a futile attempt to flee to America. This was John, Jacob's second oldest brother. He, his wife and two children made the long journey to Germany only for John to contract a fatal disease. He died near the border and his family was forced to return to Saratov. For financial reasons the youngest brother Alexander was compelled to marry his sister-in-law, a woman nearly ten years older in age. On September 10, 1911, Catherine gave birth to a boy whom they named Manuel. (It was Manuel who was destined to someday be the father of four dynamic, intelligent, ambitious and highly modest sons. Sorry about that last line, but I had to get into the act someplace.) This birth placed one more financial burden upon the family. Now with three children money was even more scarce, if that was possible. However these were not average people. Jacob as is by now obvious was a strong, hard working, and with

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respect to finances a highly intelligent young man. Of course these same traits that made him a success also left him extremely bull-headed. His wife Catherine was a sturdy, healthy woman with a strong will that even though strict in character had a heart that left no one in need without help. Besides raising her family Catherine took in laundry to add that little extra to the family income. Even with money this tight Jacob purchased two homes which he paid for over a five year period. Something in their life was missing however, they soon realized. They were farming people and could not rest until they owned land of their own. One day Jacob was approached by a lumberman who had a farm near Ransom, Kansas. This farm he had rented to a man that was doing quite poorly and therefore the lumberman was making little dividend from his investment. He said, "Take you turn those houses of yours into cash and make a down payment on my farm." No sooner said than done. Jacob sold the homes for \$2,000.00 and bought the farm still owing \$2800.00. There was a crop already planted and by accident it was a good one. It was now wartime (World War I) and because of inflation he soon had an offer of \$7,500.00 for his unit. He sold and immediately bought cheaper land but more of it. This he did repeatedly over a five year period. Then in 1921, after coming to America with nothing he had cash assets of over \$14,000.00. He used this to make a down payment on a larger and nicer farm outside Udaka, Kansas. He owed \$7,000.00 on this farm and remained there until 1928. Over this time the Berschauer family grew by leaps and bounds. Jacob Jr. (who for clarity I will refer to as Jake) was born in 1915, Henry

in 1917, John in 1920, then Harold, Margaret and in 1932 Walter, Jacob and Catherine's last child was born. Tragedy also struck heavily over this time. Another daughter Irena was born^{died 1921} but at the age of two while playing on the farm she slipped into a water trough and drowned. Then in 1932 with Walter only three months old an extreme loss hit the family. Catherine died quickly of a kidney disease. This left Jacob faced with nine children to raise and no woman in the home. Much responsibility was placed on Emma but Jacob knew the children needed a mother. Before describing what now took place let me remind you that even though these people were capable of as much compassion as anyone in time, they still exhibited much more non-emotional rationale than we as individuals do today. Knowing he needed help with his family but working too hard to avail wife shopping time, an agreement was made with Elizabeth Margheim, herself having several children and without husband that went as follows: a contract was signed that is still on file by the way stating that Jacob and Elizabeth would be married, however if she didn't pan out in Jacob's judgement he would be free to give her \$1000.00 and send her back to Colorado. Jacob had known Elizabeth's first husband for he also immigrated from Russia. With this agreement made, Jacob went on with his task of now providing for fourteen children and a new bride. Jacob's final movement came when he sold a large farm in Walkeany, Kansas for an even larger one in Holyoak, Colorado. Along with this swap of land, Jacob received a sizeable sum of money. It was in Holyoak that he later became a home builder and after many years of suffering with cancer of the esophagus, he

passed on. Elizabeth and Jacob had one child between them during the time of their marriage, this being a son Richard.

It is from this point on that the Berscheuer history diverges in a thousand different directions and it is easier for each separate family to assemble the pieces than I. However I have put together a lot of information dealing with the movement of the family from Kansas to the Pacific Northwest and plan to continue this history through 1950. This information is available to anyone who is interested and I would be very appreciative if they could pass any material on to me that would help fill the gaps from the time the family settled in Kansas through 1950. As you probably have noticed dates are a definite problem in putting together something of this nature. Therefore if there are any corrections or additions especially as to birthdates let me know.